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THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION.*

BY A. T. SCHOFIELD, ESQ., M.D.

(Chairman, Executive Parents' National Educational Union).

PART II.

(Continued from page 8.)

HAVING thus surveyed the ground generally, let us consider what are the true methods of unconscious education. Matthew Arnold himself, perhaps, hardly knew when he framed the sentence, "Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life," how much it contained. To us its essential value is that it points out the true methods and principles of the education of the unconscious mind. An "atmosphere" and a "life" are, at any rate, forces that act unconsciously, and, as we shall point out, that "discipline" does the same; indeed, it is automatic in its action.

We have, as we have seen, to educate the infant, to form its character, to mould its disposition, to develop its brain, and instruct its senses, until the results emerge into full consciousness, the infant's mind and brain being already filled with hereditary tendencies and paths.

"The enormous practical importance of directing the preconscious activity through the physical nature may be admitted and systematically acted on; especially in that very earliest stage of infant education, which lays the foundation and moral habits of conscious life."*

"Darwin considered the influence of education as compared with that of heredity as infinitesimal."†

Herbert Spencer, on the other hand, and far more truly, regarded it as almost all-powerful; but then, when he said "A man resembles far more the company he keeps than that from which he descended," he was bringing in the forces of unconscious education, whereas Darwin speaks, I think, only of conscious education.

* W. B. Carpenter, *Mental Physiology*, 4th edition, p. 353.

† W. Preyer, *Mental Education of Childhood*, p. 164.

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* Sir Michael Foster, *British*

It is true that the latter, consisting of direct precepts, &c., is not so powerful as the forces of heredity. When we consider that these have their home in the unconscious mind, it is obvious that an education that will drive them out or overcome them must be addressed to unconsciousness.

Even when we consider that the physical structure of the brain is laid down according to inherited tendencies, we still say education is stronger; for we well know the education of the unconscious mind we advocate is all-powerful to change, and modify this very structure in the direction wished for.

Curiously enough, Sir Michael Foster, with a poesy that is somewhat out of place in dealing with physiology, in his address to the British Medical Association,* attributes all these mental powers to physiology herself, who here obviously stands for "the Unconscious Mind." "When physiology is dealing with those parts of the body which we call muscular, vascular, glandular tissues, and the like, rightly handled, *she* (*sic*) points out the way, not only to mend that which is hurt, to repair the damages of bad usage and disease, but so to train the growing tissues, and to guide the grown ones as that the best use may be made of them for the purposes of life. *She* not only heals, she governs and educates." Surely the poetic spirit could not idealise a science further; with the effect, however, for those who do not turn it into prose, that the real agent—the unconscious mind—is unrecognised.

"Nor," he continues, "does *she* do otherwise when *she* comes to deal with the nervous tissues. Nay, it is the very prerogative of these nervous tissues, that their life is above that of all the other tissues, contingent on the environment and susceptibility of education."

To return to Arnold. "Education is an atmosphere"—what the mind breathes. The air that we breathe is the medium that surrounds us; the atmosphere our spirits breathe is the medium that surrounds them; in short, it is our environment.

The surroundings of a man are those influences, material or immaterial, which *form the atmosphere* in which he lives; which give colour to his daily life; and, often themselves unseen, are present with him for good or evil throughout the

* Sir Michael Foster, *British Medical Journal*, Aug. 21st, 1897.

whole term of his existence. They affect and alter his nature and his happiness.*

A little child is fluid, plastic, receptive. There are two ways of imprinting upon him the shape and outlines you desire as the result of your education. The one a conscious and perceptual, the other unconscious and atmospheric. If I wish to cast a bronze statue, I do not trouble about the bronze; all my care is about the mould. Every line, every curve I wish to see on the statue must be traced *there*, and it is on the perfection of the mould that the beauty of the statue depends. I pour in the liquid bronze. The mould is its environment. Left in there long enough it fills every curve, every line, and reproduces all its features. I break the mould, and there is the statue—the outcome of its surroundings. Again, I wish to mould the child. Education is an *atmosphere*, an environment—that is, an education of the unconscious mind. This then is my first great educational force; and this shall overcome the lines of hereditary evil or defect. I spend all my time in perfecting my mould; in other words, in seeing that the child's surroundings are exactly what I wish the child to become. Then I pour the child in, and let him remain a sufficient time until environment has saturated his unconscious mind, and moulded it into its likeness. The child knows nothing of the process. It does not interfere with its happiness, but increases it; and best of all, the result is sure. A child cannot fail to bear the stamp of the atmosphere its mind has unconsciously breathed the first few years of its life, and it is this, and nothing less, that is the real foundation of its character. What a power—what an unknown force is here!

"Life and health are largely acted on (unconsciously) by agents immaterial or psychical. The lives and well-being of natures and individuals owe their colouring to these. They belong to and form part of civilisation. They are essential parts of the education from which spring the character."†

"The schoolmaster, it might with some justice be said, only gives the finishing touches to a process commenced at the moment of birth, if not much earlier. Vast stores of

* Dr. Jas. Pollock, *Book of Health*, pp. 519, 520.

† *Ibid.*, p. 520.

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* Sir J. C. Browne, *Book of*
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knowledge indispensable and of paramount importance are picked up spontaneously (unconsciously) in babyhood."*

"Educational experience proves that nothing exerts so great an influence on the psychical organism as the moral atmosphere which is breathed by it. The composition of that atmosphere is of fundamental importance."†

But observe, if we had only conscious minds, this force would be useless—there would be nothing to act on in us; for it can only work on unconscious material. The thought, the emotions, and the will are all formed largely thus; for the will itself can be unconscious as well as conscious. We read of "automatic, passive, instructive, and imitative willing."‡

Again, "education is a discipline." An engine differs from a horse in that it is subject to discipline. It can only run on its rails; it cannot wander like a horse—at will. The laying down of the railroad is the discipline which determines the path the engine must travel. Habit is the railroad of character. "Habit is as strong as ten natures," and nature means heredity. Here again, therefore, we have another power in education to overcome inherited evil. If environment is the mould in which the mind may be cast, habit is the track along which it has to travel. Sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.

Observe again, habit is unconscious education. You say "Do this or that," and you address consciousness; with the usual result that when your back is turned, the thing is not done, and there is continual friction and punishment. You form the habit in the unconscious mind of doing this or that, and, lo and behold, you have laid down a track along which the mind finds it easier and smoother to move than in any other direction; you have provided a physiological basis for the psychic action; henceforth all is easy.

Habit, therefore, is the second great force that acts on and educates the unconscious mind.

The third and last is "Education is a life." We do not know exactly what Matthew Arnold originally meant by this. Probably that education was a vital force. We take it here in another way. Just as the "atmosphere" is the environ-

* Sir J. C. Browne, *Book of Health*, p. 345.

† W. B. Carpenter, *Mental Physiology*, 4th edit., p. 353.

‡ Prof. Holman, *Education*, pp. 79, 80.

ment or mould, as "discipline" is the habit or railroad, so "life" is the inspiration or ideal before the child.

The atmosphere moulds the mind, the discipline directs its course, and the life before it is its goal and ideal. By the life we mean the parents' life, not the child's. "The unconscious action of example shapes those feelings which give the tone to the character."* On earth it is the parent that is the child's unconscious (sometimes conscious) ideal, the child's inspirer and model. The highest ideal, the only perfection, is Divine, and it should be the parent's most earnest desire that there should be no incongruity between the two; but that the idea of fatherhood the child receives from the concrete on earth should only prepare it better to understand the perfection of the abstract in heaven.

We have, therefore, in the education of the unconscious, to consider these three things: the moulding or forming of the mind by environment; the action of the mind as disciplined by habit; and lastly, looking on the mind as a living entity—the goal or ideal *before* it rather than *around* it.

And now, leaving our threefold text we would like, before finally saying good-bye to our subject, to give one or two hints respecting education more or less conscious; and the way in which the unconscious mind may be formed through the conscious.

Herbert Spencer remarks, "We are on the highway towards the doctrine long ago enunciated by Pestalozzi, that education must conform to the natural process of mental evolution. In education we are finding that success is to be achieved only by making our measures subservient to that spontaneous unfolding which all minds go through in their progress to maturity."†

Froebel's system was a happy combination of the education of the conscious and the unconscious minds, and he also followed clearly the natural course of mental evolution. The unconscious mind can clearly be educated through consciousness. Unconscious apperception can be implanted and learnt by conscious training. The difference in result between the training of the conscious and unconscious in after life is worth noting. A man whose consciousness is better trained than his unconscious mind will only betray

* W. B. Carpenter, *Mental Physiology*, 4th edit., p. 353.

† Herbert Spencer, *Education*, pp. 58, 59.

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bad manners when off guard; his conscious actions will be superior to his instincts, as we say he will appear better than he is; while, on the other hand, a man whose unconscious mind has been thoroughly trained and educated, will have better instincts than conscious actions, and he will be at his best when most unconscious. We all know these two types, and can clearly see the difference between the results of training the Conscious and Unconscious.

Schools, as a rule, train the former, home the latter. The principle of the infant school—most knowledge in shortest time, at cheapest rate—should never be imitated in the nursery.

The guiding principle in all training is not to develop or excite faculties, but to feed them, delaying their display; always thus training for remote and not for immediate results; and, above all, not over-training; for this is one of the great practical results of recognising the powers of the unconscious mind; that we see at once, if we have a certain sum total of mental force at our disposal, and if our unconscious mind requires a large amount for governing and directing the growth of the body, unless this is supplied, body growth cannot proceed, whatever amount of food may be taken.

This gives the reason why, when all the mental force is used in direct education, and over-pressure ensues, physical growth is stunted or arrested.

Fortunately now, there is increasing conformity in the artificial education of the conscious, to the earlier natural education of the unconscious.

It must not be imagined, however, that this latter education ceases when school lessons begin. On the contrary, the unconscious mind is being educated all through. Knowledge has been divided into practical (which is unconscious), and rational (which is conscious), and these two go on together.

And now a hint as to details.

The true order of conscious education is "From the known to the unknown; from the simple to the complex; from the concrete to the abstract,"* and if this order were carefully observed in all studies from learning to read, to the study of Christianity and the Bible, fewer blunders would be made, and far more satisfactory results would be obtained.

* Prof. Holman, *Introduction to Education*, p. 221.

Discrimination and exact observation by contrast and comparison through the senses should be carefully taught; and all sensations should be cultivated to the last extent by discrimination. The difficulty here, as Preyer has remarked, is that there is a "great want of discriminating terms in tastes, smells, touch: while colours and sounds are well supplied"* with descriptive words. Of course, words alone can do little: no words can teach the difference between red and green; nevertheless, sense discrimination cannot be carried far without words to register its discoveries.

Again, it is as well to get the knowledge into the brain through as many channels as possible. Hence, hearing a subject as well as reading it is a great help; and the former is often the greater educator.

"As a test of the ear and eye impressions received by reading '*As You Like It*,' it was found that when read aloud to the class by the master, they repeated it intelligently and understood the characters described; when, however, the boys were left to learn the task without hearing it read they failed to appreciate its meaning. Good aural impressions produced a mental appreciation which sight of the page failed to effect."†

Attention is most important in education, and it is found that three-quarters of an hour at a time is the longest period at which it can be fully maintained. This, therefore, should be the extent of any one lesson requiring close attention.

Attention directed to any subject may be voluntary (conscious), or involuntary (unconscious). We can fix our attention by an effort which is sometimes very great; and a time may come when the strongest volition can no longer resist the other distractions or the sense of fatigue. In children fixed attention is almost impossible, unless it be involuntary (unconscious), the power of the will being as yet so slight. Children punished for not attending are often punished for what they can't help by effort; whereas a suggestion directing their thoughts automatically would at

* W. Preyer, *Mental Education of Childhood*, p. 12

† R. P. Hollek, *Education of the Central Nervous System*, 1896. Of course the reason of the above is obviously that in hearing we have Shakespeare's thoughts interpreted through another brain to ours; whereas in reading we have them presented through the unintelligent medium of printed characters.

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once succeed. In short, it is easier to secure unconscious than conscious attention.

The mind should be well grounded in nature before it studies art. Natural theology is the impression of the Divine Mind in nature, and should precede doctrinal theology, on the principle we have already given—the concrete before the abstract.

Science, moreover, and natural theology go hand-in-hand. "True science and true religion are twin sisters, and the separation of either from the other is sure to be the death of both. Science prospers exactly in proportion as it is religious. . . . The great deeds of philosophers have been less the fruit of their intellect than of the direction of that intellect by an eminently religious tone of mind."*

As a rule, emotions should be cultivated first and the intellect afterwards. "Do" and not "don't" should be the watchword, and punishments should not be arbitrary, but in the relations of cause and effect. "What a man sows that shall he also reap." And as a last word on the whole subject of child training we cannot do better than direct attention to the profound force of the threefold maxim of Holy Writ, "Offend not—despise not—hinder not, one of these little ones."

* Prof. Huxley, quoted by Herbert Spencer, *Education*, p. 45.